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The danger of a single story: iconic stories in the aftermath of the 1994 Rwandan genocide

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Abstract

In the aftermath of the 1994 genocide, the government of Rwanda—much like other transitional regimes around the world—has prioritized reconciliation initiatives that educate civilians with a highly politicized understanding of the conflict, and encourage them to speak about the conflict and its aftermath in a manner that reinforces the legitimacy of the current government. However, individual survivors, bystanders, ex-combatants and/or perpetrators of the genocide find various subtle ways to reinforce, resist or complicate the current official history. This article analyses a series of ‘iconic stories’ that are repeated by Rwandans in different settings due to their historical and personal resonance for what they can tell us about the ethnic and political tensions that often continue to divide Rwandans and the overall challenges associated with everyday life since the genocide. Yet engaging with these iconic stories places the researcher in a difficult position where the democratizing potential of oral history is potentially undermined. This paper argues that even while qualitative researchers have an obligation to listen deeply to their informants, their moral and professional obligations to avoid reproducing narratives that promote potentially reprehensible agendas—for example, genocide denial—make contextualizing their participants’ narratives in relation to the personal, historical, and political climate in which they are being produced essential.

Keywords

Ethnography, genocide, iconic stories, oral history, Rwanda, social repair

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‘The danger of a single story’: iconic stories in post-genocide Rwanda

Introduction

‘Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and malign, but stories can also be used to empower and humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity... I would like to end with this thought: that when we reject the single story, that when we realize that there is never a single story about any place, we regain a kind of paradise...’ (Adichie, 2009).

In recent years, the subject of collective memory has received much attention as scholars and practitioners affiliated with ethnography, oral history and related social science methodologies struggle to articulate the social, historical and political mechanisms that privilege certain memories and ways of remembering over others.¹ Within the resulting body of literature, collective memory—also referenced as dominant, national, official, or public memory—is frequently approached as ‘a formidable coercive process that induces the individual memory to coalesce with the dominant one’ (Ryan, 2010: 159, referencing Thomson, 1994).

Yet scratching the surface of this literature reveals criticisms that draw upon empirical and anecdotal evidence in support of the realization that at the individual level, the reception and internalization of collective memory is far from simple or uniform. For example, Lorainne Ryan (2010: 159) argues that ‘[t]he analysis of collective memory purely in terms of elites and hegemony mistakenly neglects the reception of the official memory.’ Her investigation of mnemonic resistance—individual or community acts of resistance to a collective memory narrative—reveals that while some individuals may adopt a narrative in the manner envisaged by political elites, for example, other

individuals will adapt the narrative to better mesh with their lived experiences and perspectives. Still others will reject the collective narrative outright. Similarly, Laura Basu's analysis of present-day remembrance of Australian outlaw and national hero, Ned Kelly, reveals how mediation, temporality and power intermingle such that '[e]nduring cultural memories are never made by politicians, monuments or individual media representations alone' but are instead 'formed and develop through a tangle of relations that reaches back and forth across time' to directly affect national identity formation on an individual level (2011: 33). Likewise, Farhat Shahzad's study of how Canadian youth construct collective memories surrounding the War on Terror offers similar insights. Shahzad finds collective memories are 'more dynamic, multiple, shared and contested in their nature' than previously articulated in the literature, and that members of a community can simultaneously be invested in multiple versions of an event according to the agency of the narrator, the material technologies available to them, and the social networks in which they are embedded (2012: 379).

Given these recent critiques, an interrogation of collective memory as it relates to qualitative studies of mass atrocities and their aftermaths becomes crucial. In particular, scholars must be mindful about eliciting and reproducing dominant narratives that, while seemingly innocuous, are constructed in a manner that furthers political or ideological agendas, particularly those that might enhance divisions within a population, for example. As a starting point, this article analyses 'iconic stories'—pervasive accounts that are internalized and recounted due to their personal and/or historical resonance for the narrator. This term was first introduced by Linda Shopes (2002: 9), who used it to encapsulate 'concrete, specific accounts that "stand for" or sum up something the narrator

reckons of particular historical importance’ that are ‘presented as unique or totemic events and are communicated with considerable emotional force.’ To better express their personal importance, Sherna Berger Gluck (2013: 12) later expanded this term to include any ‘anecdote that resonates so deeply that the narrator adopts it as her own.’

Iconic stories can pose certain challenges to the study of mass atrocities. To explore these challenges, the following discussion analyzes the deeper meaning of four iconic stories common to post-genocide Rwanda that were documented during three fieldwork trips between one and eight months in duration between 2007 and 2012. During these trips, I conducted—with help from research assistants fluent in Kinyarwanda—life history and thematic interviews with more than seventy Rwandans, including government officials, survivors, returnees, ex-combatants, convicted *génocidaires*, and bystanders.² This fieldwork revealed the presence of common iconic stories among Rwandans from a range of regional, economic, and political backgrounds, revealing much about the dynamics surrounding collective memory and history in the aftermath of the genocide. I argue that while these iconic stories are important in their own right for revealing the ongoing political and ethnic tensions in post-genocide Rwanda, researchers must analyze them carefully within this wider context to avoid unwittingly reproducing reprehensible political agendas or negatively contributing to a political climate in which collective memory is conflated with identity and power, restricting public discourse to those narratives that aim to legitimize the current government (Ricouer, 2004; Ryan, 2010).

Approaching post-genocide Rwanda

Beginning in October 1990, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF)—a political party composed primarily of militarized Tutsi refugees who had fled previous periods of ethnic

violence—invaded Rwanda from Uganda, triggering a civil war. The invasion was intended to force the government, then led by Hutu President Juvénal Habyarimana, to accept a power-sharing agreement and recognize the right to return of Tutsi refugees of previous periods of violence. However, the invasion radicalized many of Rwanda’s Hutu elites, whom in their efforts to undermine popular support for the RPF implemented a media campaign of anti-RPF and anti-Tutsi rhetoric and began training Hutu youth to defend their nation against the so-called foreign invaders—giving rise to the infamous ‘Hutu Power’ movement.³

Within hours of Habyarimana’s assassination on 6 April 1994, Hutu youth militias known as the *Interahamwe* and the *Impuzamugambi* set up roadblocks around Kigali while the Presidential Guard executed moderate Hutu and Tutsi politicians.⁴ Further exacerbating tensions, the notorious *Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines* (RTLM) broadcast allegations that the RPF was responsible and called upon the Hutu majority to avenge the death of their president. As the violence spread across those areas of Rwanda not yet under RPF control, ordinary Hutu civilians around Rwanda were encouraged to kill their Tutsi neighbors at roadblocks and in the churches, schools, and offices where they sought refuge. By the time the RPF wrestled control of the nation three months later, an estimated 400,000 to 800,000 civilians—most of whom were Rwandan Tutsi—had been massacred.⁵

Since the genocide, President Paul Kagame—the current leader of the RPF—has been celebrated as the savior of the Rwandan people. First responders promoted an image of Kagame, and the RPF more generally, as a hardworking, benevolent force dedicated to the advancement of Rwanda.⁶ Under Kagame’s leadership, the international community

remains impressed by the high degree of political stability and the RPF's commitment to rapid progress in education, health care, and national unity and reconciliation.⁷

However, more careful analysis recognizes the RPF to be a source of instability in the region. Several human rights organizations and experts have produced damaging reports detailing the lack of civil liberties and democratic reforms in Rwanda. The Kagame regime is criticized for muzzling genuine political opposition, tampering with election results, limiting freedom of expression and freedom of the press, harassing, torturing, and assassinating suspected political dissidents, and waging a proxy war in the DRC.⁸

Rwandans who speak out against the RPF's human rights abuses risk government harassment, illegal detention and imprisonment, and in extreme cases, assassination, resulting in a growing political opposition in exile. As a result, Rwanda's political climate is tense and many civilians justifiably fear their government.

This climate has led several scholars to approach post-genocide Rwanda as a highly politicized setting, wherein the government 'exerts significant control over sociopolitical discourses and seeks to control what people can say about the government and its policies' (Burnet, 2012, Jessee, 2011, Longman, 2011, Pottier, 2002, Thomson, 2010: 20). The RPF, much like previous regimes, has established an official history that is disseminated to the public through an ambitious program of nationalized commemoration, school curricula and the media (Burnet, 2012; Desrosiers and Thomson, 2011). Rwandans who express their disapproval in public settings run the risk of being labeled political subversives, genocide deniers or terrorists resulting in political and/or legal persecution (Longman, 2011; Republic of Rwanda, 2008, 2001; Purdeková, 2011).

Conducting fieldwork under these circumstances can be a tense and risky endeavor. The narratives that inform this article have emerged from ethnographic and oral historical fieldwork conducted in Rwanda since 2007. In terms of ethnography, I have periodically immersed myself in everyday life in Rwanda to elicit a ‘view from below’ regarding the challenges facing Rwandans, particularly in rural communities.⁹ This approach facilitated a thorough understanding of how Rwandans—the majority of whom adhere to some form of Christianity—negotiate traditions and taboos surrounding death and dying, mourning, and the handling of the dead, both in times of peace and in periods of ethnic and political violence. It has also made visible the ‘amplified silences’ that Rwandan negotiate on a daily basis to ensure they remain in good standing with the government.¹⁰

This approach was enhanced by conducting multiple interviews with individual participants. Initial encounters took the form of life history interviews, during which participants took the lead in describing their lives in as little or as much detail as they felt necessary. Once they were satisfied with their life history, we would shift to thematic interviews during which I asked questions specific to my research interests. I then contextualized their responses in relation to their life histories and relevant ethnographic data I had collected. The use of life histories as a starting point for understanding the participants’ lived experiences gradually made visible the politics of history navigated by many Rwandans since the genocide.

While many Rwandans freely participate in foreign research projects on controversial topics, it is unethical for foreign researchers to disseminate the resulting narratives without discussing with participants and research assistants how to effectively minimizing harm for them. For this reason, many of the interviews and casual

conversations upon which this article is based were not—at the request of my participants—recorded, and have been reconstructed from fieldnotes. In other instances, transcripts translated from Kinyarwanda to English are used to retain as much as possible participants’ original words and meanings. To maintain confidentiality, I use pseudonyms in most references to participants and refrain from discussing any personally identifying information in my publications.

The resulting narratives have been analyzed in relation to the social, political and historical contexts in which they were produced. To this end, storytelling in post-genocide Rwanda can be an inherently political act. Faced with decades of historical revisionism under different regimes, many Rwandans want to set the record straight according to their lived experiences and the wealth of oral traditions in which they were embedded. On multiple occasions, participants insisted on explaining Rwanda’s ‘real history’ as their condition for contributing to this research. However, I quickly realized that rather than escaping the historical revisionism I associated with the various regimes that have ruled Rwanda, I was simply exposing additional, personalized layers of historical revisionism.

Thus, at minimum the iconic stories emerging from post-genocide Rwanda needed to be analyzed in relation to the life history of individual narrators, and the surrounding social, historical, and political climate. Furthermore, whereas many oral histories of mass atrocities focus primarily on survivors’ narratives, engaging with the narratives of *génocidaires*, ex-combatants, and other parties to the conflict becomes crucial. In post-genocide Rwanda, failure to do so puts the researcher at risk of privileging narratives that reinforce the current official history, silencing discussion of the various forms of

suffering endured by Rwandans surrounding the genocide and contributing to a powerful reservoir of ethnic and political tensions among Rwandans.

Contextualizing the plethora of stories that greet researchers is far from an easy task, particularly for foreigners. As outsiders to Rwanda, foreign researchers are faced with steep cultural and political learning curves, and their ability to navigate them with any degree of success largely depends on the gatekeepers and informants who serve as their first points of contact, helping to vet research questions and in-country partner organizations, inform ethics protocol, and even recruit research assistants and participants (Jessee, 2012). Broadly speaking, those who work closely with government organizations based in Kigali, for example, often tend to internalize a view of post-genocide Rwanda that is largely complementary—one that recognizes that the Kagame regime is maintaining tight control over Rwandan civil society, but justifies this control as necessary to ensure long-term peace, political stability, and economic development of the nation. Among those foreign researchers who work closely with rural communities, however, a contradictory perspective often emerges—one that highlights the tensions and dangers that inform everyday life in Rwanda, often attributed to the Rwandan government and the rumored network of spies it maintains. Under these circumstances, what then constitutes a highly politicized or divisive narrative can vary dramatically. In my case, I had multiple first points of contact as the research project from which this article emerges involved working not only with government officials, but staff at the state-funded genocide memorials, rural survivors, convicted *génocidaires* and community-based organization officials around Rwanda.¹¹ An average day of fieldwork typically involved meetings and interviews with Rwandans who maintained vastly

different perspectives on the genocide and its aftermath. Given these somewhat unusual circumstances, I often relied upon research assistants and participants to guide me in determining which narratives might prove problematic if disseminated to the public without adequate contextualization. I asked the research assistants with whom I worked to mention as part of their translation if they felt a particular story being recounted by a participant was inaccurate or perhaps being recast in a problematic manner so I could make note of this and discuss it at a later point. Likewise, by conducting multiple interviews with each participant, I had ample opportunities to ask their perspectives on the narratives I was encountering, which allowed me to better understand the political and personal symbolic capital attributed to them. In doing so, I made it clear that my interest in these problematic narratives was not to condemn people for constructing lies, for example, but rather to ensure I provided adequate context so as to avoid unwittingly legitimating a version of events that could prove distressing or promote further tensions among Rwandans. For even if a research assistant or participant found a particular narrative morally reprehensible, I recognized that this did not mean the narrative was not still valuable for revealing what a particular individual held to be psychologically true (Laub, 1992).

Iconic stories in post-genocide Rwanda

Having established the methodological and ethical foundation underlying this article, I will now consider four iconic stories commonly narrated by Rwandans that are particularly helpful for demonstrating the challenges inherent in narrative analysis in the post-genocide period. The first two iconic stories had great personal resonance for the participants who narrated them, while the third and four iconic stories are more important

for their historical resonance. In addition to revealing the everyday political and ethnic tensions that persist in the post-genocide period, these narratives encode subtle resistance to the current official history—‘the 1994 genocide of the Tutsi’ as it is labeled in official parlance.¹² Taken together, I argue that Rwandans are constantly adapting iconic stories to reflect their individual lived experiences and political agendas, which in turn expose the subtle ethnic and political tensions impacting post-genocide Rwanda.

Iconic story #1: ‘I’ll never be Tutsi again’

The Kigali Genocide Memorial Center (KGMC) houses a photo exhibit dedicated to children who were murdered during the 1994 genocide. One photograph shows a smiling child whose last words are cited as ‘I’ll never be Tutsi again’—a stark reminder of the brutality of the genocide and the injustices and indignities inflicted upon unarmed civilians, particularly children. Within the wider context of the exhibit, however, it is damning evidence against the Hutu majority, who are depicted throughout as having been manipulated by Hutu Power extremists into supporting and even directly participating in the torture, murder, and mutilation of their Tutsi compatriots.¹³

During casual conversations and interviews with survivors and returnees, the origins of the words—‘I’ll never be Tutsi again’—were frequently attributed to the child victims of the genocide in a given area, often the child of a relative or friend. The accompanying story was always shared in a similar context, highlighting two points. First, the child’s confusion regarding his or her ethnicity—that being a Tutsi was not something an individual could choose, but rather inherited patrilineally—emphasized the child’s innocence. This in turn emphasized the attackers’ vehement hatred of Tutsi—a hatred so irrational that even a child could not be spared. Such violence is taboo in Rwanda, where

women and children are described as *nyampinga*, a term that expresses their innocence and inability to inflict suffering upon others.

Augustin, an elderly survivor who had experienced several periods of ethnic and political violence in his community noted that: ‘In our culture, a child is considered an angel because of his innocence. Children were protected not only by their parents, but by every adult around.’ Other participants referred to children as treasures that were the pride and responsibility of the whole community, not just their immediate families. In this context, the fact that any Rwandan could kill a child from their community, let alone a child who had no understanding as to why he or she is being killed, is not only evocative, but also stigmatizes those who were involved—shame that is cast upon the Hutu masses in general.¹⁴ As such, within Rwanda this iconic story resonates particularly strongly with survivors and returnees who have suffered intimate losses surrounding the genocide, while alienating the Hutu majority.

This iconic story has been reproduced beyond Rwanda as well, further demonstrating to its relevance. For example, Samantha Power (2003: 334) recounts the story of a child who was murdered under nearly identical circumstances:

Because the Hutu and Tutsi had lived intermingled, and in many instances, intermarried, the outbreak of killing forced Hutu and Tutsi friends and relatives into life-altering decisions about whether or not to desert their loved ones in order to save their own lives. At Mugonero Church in the town of Kibuye, two Hutu sisters, each married to a Tutsi husband, faced such a choice. One of the women decided to die with her husband. The other, who hoped to save the lives of her eleven children, chose to leave. Because her husband was Tutsi, her children had been categorized as Tutsi and thus were technically

forbidden to live. But the machete-wielding Hutu attackers had assured the woman that the children would be permitted to depart safely if she agreed to accompany them. When the woman stepped out of the church, however, she saw the assailants butcher eight of the eleven children. The youngest, a child of three years old, pleaded for his life after seeing his brothers and sisters slain. "Please don't kill me," he said. "I'll never be Tutsi again." But the killers, unblinking, struck him down.

Power's version demonstrates the story's iconic quality beyond Rwanda. It identifies Tutsi victims and Hutu perpetrators, implying—given the conflict is clearly between two ethnic groups—that signatories to the United Nations Genocide Convention should have prevented the genocide—an important point given her book's overarching criticism of the US government's failure to prevent genocide in the twentieth century.¹⁵ And once again, the innocence of the child is paramount, as is his brutal murder, reinforcing the genocide's brutality amid the Hutu perpetrators' deep-seated hatred of the Tutsi.

However, demonstrating the dynamic, shared and contested nature of iconic stories, and collective memory, more generally, Power's version of the story diverges from that of the survivors and returnees whom I interviewed in important ways. First, Power alludes to Rwandans' pre-genocide intermingling, perhaps to emphasize the irrationality of the Hutu extremists' hatred of the Tutsi by depicting an ethnocentrism so powerful that even partial Tutsi heritage justified a death sentence. Second, Power emphasizes the choiceless decisions faced by many Hutu civilians as they chose between survival and the desertion of their loved ones or death at the hands of the génocidaires. This framing creates space for a side of the story rarely voiced publically in Rwanda—one where not all Hutu committed murder, but instead refused to participate, rescued Tutsi at great personal risk,

or acted simultaneously as génocidaires and rescuers, killing those Tutsi they did not know or with whom they had a history of interpersonal conflict, while hiding Tutsi friends and family (Jessee, 2015). Power's narrative hints at a more complex relationship between Hutu and Tutsi civilians, and even among Hutu, during the genocide.

Unsurprisingly, this iconic story was completely absent from génocidaires' narratives.

Due to the cultural taboos against harming children and the legal consequences of acknowledging complicity in such atrocities, génocidaires—men and women alike—rarely discussed violence against children.¹⁶ They unanimously claimed to be against the killing of children, and argued that such atrocities did not occur in their communities during the genocide.¹⁷ This tendency likely emerged from the fact that many génocidaires had learned through participation in transitional justice programs like *ingando* and *gacaca* that there were harsher legal and social consequences for admitting to such crimes, making them far more taboo than other forms of violence.¹⁸

In general conversations about symbolic violence, however, génocidaires were more forthcoming, acknowledging that their superiors sometimes encouraged the killing of children. To this end, an iconic story narrated by several génocidaires told of Kagame's escape from Rwanda as a baby on his mother's back during the 1959 Hutu Revolution. Valérie Bemeriki—formerly an infamous RTLM radio host—recalled that Hutu Power extremists used this story to emphasize the necessity of eliminating all Tutsi this time around.¹⁹ Having escaped Rwanda in 1959, as a refugee in Uganda Kagame was educated, given military training, and connected with other politically active Rwandan refugees whom would eventually form the RPF. According to RTLM propaganda, Kagame then returned to Rwanda decades later to murder Habyarimana, undermine

Rwandan democracy, and re-enslave the Hutu majority.²⁰ The RTLM used this story of Kagame's origins as an example of what was at stake for the Hutu if they failed, once again, to eliminate the Tutsi threat.

According to several génocidaires from different regions, high-level Hutu Power extremists recounted the story of Kagame's childhood escape to encourage them to kill all Tutsi—and especially children. If they failed to do so, another Kagame might rise up from among the genocide survivors to threaten the Hutu Power movement anew.

Constructed in this manner, génocidaires employed the story as a means of justifying the murder of Tutsi children, as well as expressing their disapproval of Kagame and the RPF, who from the perspective of many had successfully re-enslaved Rwanda's Hutu majority in the post-genocide period.

Iconic story #2: The impaled woman

A second iconic story emerged circulated around the Nyamata memorial, where an estimated 2,500 Tutsi civilians were massacred during the genocide. As part of the tour, memorial guides often accompany visitors into a crypt in the center of the church where they recount the story of a young Tutsi mother. During the massacre, the attackers took her into the church courtyard, along with a handful of other beautiful Tutsi women. The attackers took turns raping these women, all the while talking about how this was the only way they could have sex with Tutsi women and how it proved Tutsi women were not so superior after all.²¹ The women were then killed. However, the young mother was subject to a particularly brutal form of execution. Her attackers impaled her vagina and breasts with sharpened sticks, and threw her body—along with that of her child—into the church latrine. Their remains were recovered a few years later when local survivors

decided the time had come to give the victims a more respectful burial. Unlike the other victims, however, this particular woman's body allegedly showed no signs of decomposition. For this reason, the local community honors her as a saint whose sexual assault and murder are further evidence of the excessive brutality of the Hutu extremists. Rwandan survivors from the surrounding community speak often of this woman and others who shared a similar fate in speaking about the genocide. Several survivors described female family members or friends who were killed in a comparable manner, both at Nyamata church and elsewhere in the region. Their preoccupation with this iconic story conveys three messages about the genocide. First, the woman's innocence is paramount. In the context of Rwandan culture, her gender, combined with her status as a mother and her decision to seek refuge at the church, should have afforded her protection. Survivors always stressed that in previous periods of political and ethnic violence in Rwanda, women and children who sought refuge at churches were spared. Second, the manner in which she was tortured and murdered by the Hutu extremists emphasizes their violently ethnocentric beliefs. This relates to a third important message, whereby survivors frequently argued that the Hutu extremists had internalized a particularly vehement hatred for Tutsi women in particular, because they allegedly used their superior beauty to enslave Hutu men (Malkki, 1995). Survivors offered this explanation to make sense of why Tutsi women were subject to humiliating, overtly sexual forms of torture and murder during the genocide.

For example, in attempting to make sense of this phenomenon, Venant – another elderly survivor – recalled:

It was sheer wickedness. It was meant to wipe out the Tutsi in the most atrocious way. Hutu women disliked Tutsi women. They felt Tutsi women took away their husbands by seducing them. In reality, Hutu men longed for Tutsi women because of their beauty. When they did not marry them, they would keep them as concubines.

Interpersonal conflicts may have been a contributing factor, however. Serafina—a survivor from Nyamata—mentioned that prior to the genocide, the impaled woman had had a bad reputation. She was proud of her exceptional beauty, and had rejected several Hutu suitors specifically because she saw them as inferior and wanted a Tutsi husband. While this by no means justifies the brutal treatment she endured, Serafina mentioned this aspect of her personality as an explanation for why the woman’s attackers singled her out for such a brutal death.

Génocidaires’ narratives reinforced the possibility that such extreme violence served a symbolic purpose, as well as a functional one. As indicated above, violence against women is taboo within Rwandan culture. Thus, this particular iconic story and the brutality it relates, while likely familiar, was never mentioned. Only a handful of the *génocidaires* I interviewed ever admitted to participating in attacks on Tutsi women, though their frequent references to women they had ‘rescued’ may have been a subtle way of acknowledging the widespread practice of sexual slavery and forced marriage during the genocide (Baines, 2003; Carpenter, 2000; Des Forges, 1999; Sharlach, 2000). However, in general conversations about symbolic violence, impalement was occasionally discussed as an appropriate means of killing Tutsi women. Several *génocidaires* complained that Tutsi women were too proud of their beauty and acted as though they were superior to their Hutu neighbors. For example, Alexandre recalled that

during the genocide, participating in the murder of one's Tutsi neighbors gave the attackers free reign to use their victims' women 'as tools'—a powerful incentive for rural men who had grown up believing that Tutsi women were unavailable to them because of their superiority. A woman *génocidaire*, Egidie, expanded on this by noting that rape, as well as the various forms of gender-based violence that accompanied it, such as breast oblation, impalement, and leaving victims' bodies naked in the streets, was a means of giving Tutsi women the dishonorable deaths they deserved. Still other *génocidaires* expressed mystification about Tutsi women, noting that they were rumoured to have physiologically differences that made them better sexual partners than Hutu women, making them a commodity that only elite Hutu men could afford. Michel—a salesman who committed a range of atrocities during the genocide—noted he and many of the men with whom he attacked had a 'curiosity' about Tutsi women, having grown up hearing stories about how they were better sexual partners. In this context, *génocidaires* argued that rape, impalement, and other forms of gender-based violence were often framed as an appropriate means of showing Tutsi women that they were no better than their Hutu compatriots.²²

Iconic story #3: The evil monarch

The current official history champions Rwanda's pre-colonial period as a utopian era when all Rwandans were united by a monarchy. For example, among its many symbolically potent features, the KGMC hosts a 'Garden of Unity' that, according to the 2011 audio tour, represented the 'Rwanda of ancient times, when the country was united and at peace.' Elsewhere in the exhibit and in other Rwandan cultural and historical institutions, such as the Ethnographic Museum in Huye (Butare), this peace is attributed

to the strong, egalitarian leadership of the Rwandan monarchy, which is generally depicted as unanimously loved by the people, including those neighboring territories and communities that Rwanda sought to absorb into its borders to increase its regional power.²³ The policies of the German and Belgian colonizers are held solely responsible for the ethnic and political tensions that would later divide Rwandans according to ethnicity, and little attention is paid to the regional, political, socio-economic and clan divisions that existed previously.

Throughout its history, Rwanda's monarchy was a predominantly Tutsi institution. Kings came from the Abanyiginya clan and mostly married women from the matrilineal Abega, Abaha and Abakono clans to ensure stable political alliances between those families that exercised the greatest political influence and regional power (Mukarutabana, 2012). While all clans included Hutu, Tutsi and Twa, the matrilineal clans were separate from the three clans associated with the Hutu majority—the Abazibaga, Abagesera, and Abasinga—whose members engaged in direct contact with the earth for ritual and subsistence purposes without risking pollution (Newbury, 2009; Taylor, 1992). Yet despite the potential for inter-ethnic collaboration, collective memory within Rwanda recalls the monarchy as a fundamentally Tutsi institution. Furthermore, in discussing the monarchy, Rwandans often reference 'the king' as though the institution had been ruled by only one leader, rather than the countless kings, court officials, and political intimates who had exercised power over the centuries (Jessee and Watkins, 2014). But this was where similarities between narratives ended, and ethnic and political divisions became more apparent.

Among *génocidaires*, the Tutsi king was typically portrayed as evil—responsible for maintaining the economic, political, and ritual supremacy of the Tutsi minority at the expense of the Hutu majority. For example, Michel repeatedly described Rwanda’s pre-colonial past as characterized by the enslavement of the Hutu majority. He cited many family stories about how the Tutsi had abused the Hutu. For example, he claimed the Tutsi used their cattle—a status symbol in Rwandan society that persists today—to enslave the Hutu. Referencing a practice called ubuhake, Michel recalled that the Hutu had labored long hours in difficult conditions for a Tutsi patron in exchange for temporary access to a cow and the hope, often misguided, of social advancement.²⁴ But in addition to examples of everyday structural violence endured by Hutu in the pre-colonial and colonial periods, Michel was particularly enthusiastic in discussing the abuses of the Tutsi king, specifically. He described how the Tutsi king used to execute Hutu men who displeased him and hang their testicles on the royal drum *Karinga*, which in combination with the annual cycle of rituals performed by the court ritualists, formed the symbolic basis of monarchical legitimacy (Newbury, 1991). Michel was similarly incensed by a story of a king who stood by planting his spear in the bodies of Hutu children for support, resulting in their deaths.

Philippe—a former history teacher—related a similar story. However, where other *génocidaires* claimed it was the king who had stabbed Hutu children with his spear in order to support himself while he stood, Philippe’s account claimed the Tutsi Queen Mother used to murder Hutu babies by stabbing them with her sword to support herself when she stood. Philippe was quick to accuse Rwandan women in general of poisoning people or manipulating their husbands and other male family members to commit morally

reprehensible acts on their behalf, revealing a preoccupation with Rwandan women as conspirators, manipulators, and poisoners. His decision to attribute this behavior to the Queen Mother may have been rooted in his distrust of Rwandan women, perhaps emerging from his affiliation with the Hutu Power movement, which condemned Tutsi women for using their superior beauty, intelligence and good manners to trick Hutu men into servitude (Malkki, 1995). It may also have been informed by his knowledge of Kanjogera, a notorious Queen Mother who orchestrated the suicide of her adopted son King Rutarindwa during the coup of Rucunshu in 1896, and then proceeded to massacre anyone who opposed her, to make her son, Musinga, king (Des Forges, 2011, Newbury, 1988).

Iconic stories about the evil Tutsi monarch were repeated by génocidaires across Rwanda to explain their participation in the genocide and demonstrate the need for Hutu resistance. These iconic stories about the king's systemic abuses of power were grounded in claims regarding the systemic dehumanization of the Hutu prior to the colonial period. However, génocidaires often described the RPF and its treatment of the Hutu majority as a modern incarnation of the Tutsi monarchy. They wrongly claimed that Kagame was descended from the Abanyiginya clan, which they cited as evidence that Rwanda was in the grips of a new incarnation of the Tutsi monarchy.²⁵ Such sentiments were influenced by personal experiences of mass atrocities perpetrated by RPF troops and the education that many génocidaires had received under the Kayibanda and Habyarimana regimes, as well as the narratives that were transmitted within their families.²⁶

Among survivors and returnees, however, the king was remembered in more positive terms as someone who had fought for the expansion of Rwanda and the equality of all

Rwandans. Survivors and returnees only referenced the king's oppression of the Hutu to question its historical accuracy. In doing so, they condemned the irrationality of the Hutu extremists and the Hutu majority, more generally, for having been blinded by violent ethnocentrism. Augustin acknowledged the story of the king who stood by planting his spear in the bodies of Hutu children for support, but countered with his analysis—that while individual members of the monarchy could be positive or negative, it was ultimately a benevolent force in the lives of Rwandan civilians, regardless of their ethnic or political affiliation. He concluded: 'The king was seen as being above ethnic rivalry and seen by his people as being fair to everybody. The Belgians were the ones opposing the people to their king.' In Augustin's opinion, those who claimed otherwise were genocide deniers whose existence justified the RPF's decision to muzzle the political opposition and restrict civil liberties.

But much like the *génocidaires*, Augustin was personally invested in this subject. He was descended from the monarchy, and prior to independence, his family had enjoyed substantial political power in their community. Furthermore, as a survivor who had nearly died at the hands of Hutu extremists on several occasions since Rwandan independence, and whose extended family had been exterminated during the genocide, he harbored misgivings about his Hutu neighbors, most of whom he argued had escaped justice by successfully denying their complicity in the genocide. And like many Rwandan survivors, he believed that future ethnic and political violence was inevitable. While overall he did not approve of the RPF's style of leadership, which he contended privileged Tutsi returnees over 'real Rwandans,' he nonetheless believed that the RPF alone could prevent a resurgence of political and ethnic violence.

Iconic story #4: The good muzungu

A final iconic story relates the death of Antonia Locatelli, an Italian nun. She is buried at Nyamata memorial, where she is commemorated as the one *muzungu* who spoke out against the Habyarimana regime's conscious neglect of Tutsi civilians in the early 1990s.²⁷ When government-supported violence forced Tutsi civilians to seek refuge at Nyamata church, where they were denied food, water, and other necessities, Locatelli alerted the international media. Soon after, a government soldier allegedly lured Locatelli from her house in the middle of the night and shot her.

Locatelli's story is replicated within and beyond Rwanda. Following her assassination, Amnesty International (1992) demanded a formal investigation of Locatelli's murder as part of a larger effort to force the Habyarimana regime to cease the persecution of Rwandan Tutsi. Her sacrifice is formally recognized by Gardens of the Righteous Worldwide (GARIWO), an Italy-based organization that documents individuals who 'who have tried or are trying to prevent crimes of genocide, to defend human rights in extreme situations, or that struggle to safeguard memory from the recurring attempts to deny the truth about the persecutions' (GARIWO, 2012).

The story surrounding Locatelli's death is important in the context of post-genocide Rwanda for two reasons. First, memorial staff and local government officials cite the circumstances surrounding her death as evidence that the Habyarimana regime's planned to commit genocide as early as 1992. The region where she worked is portrayed as a test case in which the Habyarimana regime took advantage of a naturally occurring drought and famine to decimate its Tutsi population by withholding aid. When this more subtle

method of genocide via neglect failed, the Habyarimana regime resorted to more direct tactics—civilians armed with machetes.

Second, Locatelli was frequently heralded as ‘a good muzungu’. Unlike the rest of the international community, which refused to intervene when genocide overwhelmed Rwanda, Locatelli acted despite great personal risk. She had not only recognized the severity of the state neglect inflicted upon the Tutsi, but she used her status to bring much-needed international attention to their plight. Many local survivors argue the genocide began in 1992, and that Locatelli was among its first victims. Thus, she was given an honorary burial at Nyamata church.

However, as my fieldwork in Rwanda progressed, I began to suspect this story was intended to communicate another message. Locatelli was murdered because she spoke out against the Habyarimana regime—a government that according to the RPF’s official narrative was notable for its corruption and willingness to murder Rwandan Tutsi to distract the nation from the real problems plaguing its development. Yet, my Rwandan participants and colleagues consistently noted the similarities between the Habyarimana and Kagame regimes, particularly regarding their treatment of perceived political dissidents.²⁸ One of my research assistants often joked that from the perspective of the Kagame regime, the only good muzungu was a dead muzungu—one that had learned to keep her mouth shut about the human rights abuses that surrounded her. As part of our debriefing sessions, when faced with my growing interest in politically charged versions of Rwanda’s history, he frequently reminded me to ‘remember what happened to the Italian.’

For these reasons, I began to interpret Locatelli's story as a warning to foreigners like myself that despite our international status, we too were vulnerable to government persecution—a warning that has proved prescient over the years as more and more foreign researchers have found themselves unwelcome in Rwanda.²⁹ Perhaps this explained why so many participants repeated Locatelli's story in my presence. She had sought to delegitimize the Habyarimana regime at a time when it enjoyed a high degree of international approval, and had been silenced for her efforts, just like many of Kagame's critics since his official rise to office in 2000 (Desrosiers and Thomson, 2011). Thus, I must consider the possibility that Locatelli's story was also intended to communicate the necessity of balancing caution and silence on politically sensitive topics in the post-genocide period, for foreign researchers and Rwandans alike.

Conclusion

I began this paper with a quote by Chimamanda Adichie, in which she warns of the dangers of a single story, and celebrates the paradise that can be regained by creating space for many stories, whether recounting similar or vastly different events or experiences. Inspired by her words, I have selected four iconic stories prevalent in post-genocide Rwanda that taken individually—as single stories—could be used by different people to promote personal political agendas and assert a range of reprehensible moral judgments. I have then analyzed these narratives in an effort to articulate the individual political, social, and historical contexts that influenced their telling and dissemination in post-genocide Rwanda. This analysis raises certain questions: what can be gained from engaging with and reproducing iconic stories that emerge in highly politicized research settings, such as the aftermath of mass atrocities? And in the context of oral history and

its overarching mission to ‘democratize history,’ what are the limitations related to creating space for these stories?

This paper represents a starting point for addressing these questions. I have demonstrated that analyzing iconic stories for their deeper personal and historical meaning reveals the myriad ways that stories are internalized and adapted to encode important information regarding Rwanda’s current political climate and the persistence of ethnic and political divisions among Rwandans. This is particularly evident in the personal iconic stories, which were repeatedly used by survivors and returnees to emphasize the depravity, ignorance, and violent ethnocentrism of the Hutu majority, while justifying their lingering distrust of their Hutu compatriots and the necessity of the RPF’s authoritarian approach to governance. Yet the narratives of *génocidaires* suggest that the violence that targeted Tutsi during the genocide was not irrational. Conversely, even the torture and murder of Tutsi women and children was carefully justified according to iconic stories that reveal a perceived history of Hutu oppression and persecution under Tutsi leadership and a fear of allowing a new Tutsi hegemony to power in Rwanda. Under the circumstances, the researcher is obligated to contextualize these narratives in relation to the lived experiences and political agenda of the narrators, regardless of their ethnicity or status relative to the genocide, to avoid further reproducing narratives that could foster misperceptions among the international community, as well as further ethnic and political divisions among Rwandans.

The historical iconic stories regarding the evil nature of the Tutsi monarchy and the good *muzungu* further demonstrate the ethnic and political tensions affecting post-genocide Rwanda. *Génocidaires’* narratives of the brutal excesses of the Tutsi monarchy were

frequently narrated in a manner that sought to justify their involvement in unspeakable acts of cruelty toward their Tutsi compatriots and revealed the ongoing brutality of the RPF toward its Hutu subjects. This lengthy history of Hutu oppression was well-known to survivors, particularly those who had been educated under the Kayibanda and Habyarimana regimes, but was quickly dismissed as further evidence of the ignorance and violent ethnocentrism maintained by the Hutu majority—a much more comforting option that acknowledging the possibility that Rwanda’s past and present were plagued by social, economic, ethnic and political inequalities that privileged the Tutsi minority at the expense of the Hutu majority. Likewise, the story of the good muzungu communicated an important message regarding the necessity of caution and silence in post-genocide Rwanda, for foreigners researchers and Rwandans alike.

Taken together, the process of analyzing these iconic stories reveals much about the tensions being negotiated by Rwandans in their everyday, post-genocide lives. But something is potentially lost in this analysis as well: namely, the democratizing potential of oral historical practice. By contextualizing these iconic stories in relation to the wider personal, social, economic, and political climates in which they are being reproduced, the researcher risks overwhelming these iconic stories with analysis, obscuring the narrator’s intended purpose. This concern does not change the fact that such contextualization and analysis is a necessity in post-genocide Rwanda where it is difficult for ordinary Rwandans to speak about their experiences of the genocide and related mass atrocities, as well as Rwandan history, more generally, in a manner that might contradict the RPF’s official history, given the authorities’ tendency to interpret such acts as an attempt to delegitimize the current regime.

However, analysis of iconic stories like those discussed above can over time create space for public discussion of lived experiences that are impossible to voice in post-genocide Rwanda by maintaining the privacy and confidentiality of the participants. In this sense, the democratizing potential of oral history is being maintained to some extent precisely because it allows for a multiplicity of voices in a setting where such opportunities are typically few and far between. As argued by Erin Baines and Beth Stewart (2011), storytelling is an essentially social act that can contribute to restoring social equilibrium in transitional societies, particularly when conducted in a culturally appropriate and safe environment. Bringing iconic stories into conversation in a safe space, making them accessible to Rwandans from a range of backgrounds, and highlighting the different meanings intended by different actors can facilitate understanding and ultimately, social repair among Rwandans. For as asserted by Veena Das and Arthur Kleinman, “[f]inding one’s voice in the making of one’s history, the remaking of a world... is also a matter of being able to re-contextualize the narratives of devastation and generate new contexts through which everyday life may become possible” (2001: 6). Under the circumstances, perhaps an appropriate practice going forward would be for ethnographers, oral historians, and related practitioners who work in conflicted and post-conflict communities to challenge iconic stories and collective memories, more generally, to better expose their underlying dynamic, multiple, shared and contested natures and prevent the replication of overly simplistic narratives that might otherwise serve to deepen, rather than diminish, lingering divisions within communities and nations.

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¹ For excellent overviews of the “construction of collective memory,” see Farhat Shahzad’s article on “Collective memories: a complex construction” (2012: 379) and Jeffrey Olick’s “‘Collective memory’: a memoir and prospect” (2008).

² The term *génocidaire*, while rooted in the French word *génocideur*, is distinctly Rwandan and references those individuals who committed crimes during the genocide. In everyday usage, the term implies Hutu ethnicity, though legally, any Rwandan can be prosecuted for genocide-related crimes.

³ The most thorough and historically sound overview of the events that occurred during the genocide is Alison Des Forges’ *Leave None to Tell the Story: Genocide in Rwanda* (1999).

⁴ Controversy has emerged over which parties to the conflict are responsible for Habyarimana’s assassination. Soon after Habyarimana’s death, a Belgian journalist reported that two French soldiers were responsible for the assassination, while Etienne

Sengegera, the Rwandan ambassador to the DRC alleged that Belgian peacekeepers were to blame (Prunier, 1997: 213-214). RPF supporters allege that Habyarimana's inner circle had him assassinated following his decision to sign the Arusha Accords because they felt he had betrayed the Hutu cause (Des Forges, 1999: 182). In 2010, the Rwandan government released the Mutsinzi Report (Republic of Rwanda, 2010), which argues that the Rwandan Armed Forces were responsible for engineering and implementing Habyarimana's assassination. These findings were loosely confirmed by the preliminary Trévidic report (Trédivic and Poux, 2012), though critics have noted that both the Mutsinzi and Trévidic reports failed to take into consideration the testimonies of ex-RPF combatants who claim Kagame was responsible for orchestrating Habyarimana's assassination (Schofield, 2012). To this end, André Guichaoua, a sociologist and former expert witness for the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), has concluded based on evidence collected and verified by ICTR prosecutors that the RPF was most likely responsible for Habyarimana's assassination (Guichaoua, 2015: 144-145).

⁵ The number of victims of the genocide is similarly controversial, with conservative estimates by the international community maintaining that between 400,000 and 800,000 Rwandan civilians died, and generous estimates promoted by the RPF arguing that over one million Tutsi died. This paper uses the moderate estimate suggested by Alison Des Forges (1999: 15-16).

⁶ First responders to the genocide included journalists like Philip Gourevitch (1998) and Fergal Keane (1995) who gained access to regions of Rwanda that had been overrun and stabilized by the RPF. These journalists' proximity to RPF troops and political elites

resulted in a host of pro-RPF reports and articles that were largely uncritical of the human rights abuses perpetrated by RPA soldiers in their efforts to take control of the nation.

⁷ For positive accounts of post-genocide Rwanda, see Stephen Kinzer's *A thousand hills* (2008) and Bill Clinton's 2013 BBC interview, in which he implies that Rwanda's heavily criticized human rights record is less important given Rwanda's stellar development progress.

⁸ Amnesty International (2012, 2011, 2010) and Human Rights Watch (2011, 2010a) are the most outspoken NGO critics of the Kagame regime's human rights record. In addition, scholars such as Alison Des Forges (1999), Paul Gready (2011), Aloys Habimana (2011), Bert Ingelaere (2011), Timothy Longman (2011), Johan Pottier (2002), Filip Reyntjens (2015, 2006, 2004), Susan Thomson (2011a; 2010; 2009) and Lars Waldorf (2011) have provided constant analysis of Rwanda's gradually worsening human rights record. The Kagame regime has responded that human rights can only come after the achievement of political stability and development—that there is no hope for long-term peace in Rwanda without a higher standard of living and education for all Rwandans.

⁹ My focus on rural Rwandans was largely influenced by the work of David and Catharine Newbury (2000).

¹⁰ Jennie Burnet has introduced the term 'amplified silence' in reference to the 'intense public silence' that exists 'surrounding RPF-perpetrated violence experienced by Rwandans of all ethnicities' (2012: 111).

¹¹ The term *génocidaire* is distinctly Rwandan and refers to those individuals who committed atrocities during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. In common usage, it is often

treated as synonymous with the Hutu majority. For more information on the initial research project associated with this article, see my forthcoming book and related publications (Jessee, 2016; Jessee, 2015; Jessee, 2012; Jessee, 2011; Jessee and Watkins 2014).

¹² This label is a relatively recent addition to public discourse on the genocide in Rwanda, and the Rwandan government and a handful of Rwandan civil society organizations have been lobbying to have adopted by the international community. In 2014, Olivier Nduhungirehe, Rwanda's deputy permanent representative to the UN, announced a major victory of this campaign after the UN Security Council referenced 'the 1994 genocide of the Tutsi in Rwanda, during which Hutu and others were killed' in Resolution 2136 on the DRC (Gahiji, 2014; Kagire, 2014; UN Security Council, 2014).

¹³ In fact, the lived realities of Hutu civilians surrounding the genocide were far more complex. There is a plethora of literature detailing the RPF-perpetrated mass atrocities endured by Hutu civilians, beginning with the RPA invasion of northern Rwanda in 1990 and extending into the post-genocide period (Des Forges, 1999; Umutesi, 2004; UN, 2010). Likewise, there is ample evidence to suggest that Hutu civilians' actions surrounding the genocide was more varied than acknowledged by the current official narrative (Conway, 2011; Jefremovas, 1995; Jessee, 2015; Waldorf, 2009).

¹⁴ During the genocide, it was common practice in some communities for the Hutu Power extremists to separate Tutsi women, children and the elderly—those who were physically weak—and give them to Hutu women and children to kill (Des Forges, 1999). This practice ensured widespread complicity in the massacres.

¹⁵ Signatories to the 1948 UN Genocide Convention are legally obligated to intervene to prevent and punish genocide, defined as ‘any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group’ (UN Genocide Convention, 1948:Article II).

¹⁶ Certain acts of violence, if perpetrated during the genocide, carry automatic life sentences as Category 4 crimes (Tertsakian, 2008). For this reason, *génocidaires* often refused to speak about sexual violence, the murder of children, and other highly criminal atrocities.

¹⁷ Despite the *génocidaires*’ unwillingness to acknowledge violence against children, Alison Des Forges (1999) and Human Rights Watch (2003), among others, have documented hundreds of cases across Rwanda that indicate violence against children was widespread.

¹⁸ *Ingando* refers to reeducation camps for confessed *génocidaires* and other criminals who are about to be returned to their communities (Thomson, 2011b). *Gacaca* is a dispute resolution mechanism reinvented by the RPF in the post-genocide period to help reduce the burden of the estimated 140,000 accused *génocidaires* awaiting trial (Ingelaere, 2007, Thomson and Nagy 2011).

¹⁹ Valérie Bemeriki insisted that I use her real name when referencing our conversations. Otherwise, pseudonyms are used throughout this article to maintain my participants’ and

research assistants' confidentiality. In addition, I refrain from including personally identifying information about my participants.

²⁰ Conversely, the RPF claims their invasion was motivated by their determination to force the Habyarimana regime into a power-sharing agreement that would end the system of anti-Tutsi discrimination and oppression, and permit Tutsi refugees of previous periods of ethnic and political violence to return to Rwanda.

²¹ Several scholars have noted the prevalence of an inferiority complex internalized by Hutu men and women, which during the genocide resulted in Tutsi women being subject to particularly brutal forms of torture and murder intended to 'diminish' them. This inferiority complex is rooted in the 'Hamitic hypothesis' made popular in Rwanda during the colonial period, which celebrated the Tutsi's alleged Caucasian heritage as descendants of the biblical figure Ham, and granted them disproportionate access to educational opportunities and power on the grounds they were more intelligent, well-mannered and attractive than their Hutu and Twa compatriots (Baines, 2003, Des Forges, 1999, Taylor, 2001).

²² Christopher Taylor (2001) and Liisa Malkki (1995) have offered more detailed symbolic analysis of impalement in the context of the 1994 genocide.

²³ This position contradicts accounts established by notable historians like Alison Des Forges (2011), Catharine Newbury (1988), and Jan Vansina (2004), who provide an image of pre-colonial Rwanda, particularly under the Nyaginya, as engaged in aggressive territorial expansion, creating a range of regional tensions from overt warfare to more subtle political struggles.

²⁴ Catharine Newbury has argued that *ubuhake*, which could occur between any Rwandan patron and a client regardless of ethnicity, was actually far less divisive than the more widespread practice of *uburetwa*, a form of *corvée* labour whereby Hutu civilians worked, paid taxes, and gave a portion of their crops to a Tutsi landholder in exchange for access to land (Newbury, 1980: 100; see also Vansina, 2004: 134).

²⁵ Paul Kagame is actually descended from the Abakagera lineage of the Abega clan, which as a matrilineal clan, still connotes elite status in Rwandan society.

²⁶ Much like the RPF, Kayibanda and Habyarimana engaged in historical revisionism during their rule. However, the official narratives under Kayibanda and Habyarimana demonized the Tutsi as a means of distracting the Rwandan people from the corruption and mismanagement that characterized their tenure (Newbury, 2002).

²⁷ The term *muzungu* (pl. *bazungu*) is used widely across Eastern Africa in reference to all foreigners, regardless of ethnicity.

²⁸ Marie-Eve Desrosiers and Susan Thomson (2011: 430) have made similar observations, noting that both regimes have relied upon an image of ‘benevolent leadership’ to win over the international community and discipline the Rwandan population.

²⁹ To date, only a handful of researchers, including the late Alison Des Forges, René Lemarchand and Filip Reyntjens, have been formally declared *persona non grata* in Rwanda. However, several researchers have reported encountering difficulties with returning to Rwanda to continue their research after they published work that was critical of Kagame and the RPF (ASA, 2012, HRW, 2012b, Jessee, 2013), and in 2015 the Commission for the Fight to Prevent Genocide allegedly published a list of those

researchers, journalists and other professionals that it considered *persona non grata* due to their alleged involvement in promoting genocide denial (Democracy in Rwanda Now, 2015).

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Biography

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